

‘No Chance’ U.S. Can Stop Chinese Invasion of Taiwan, Military Expert Says



© Pavel Golovkin / POOL/AFP via Getty Images Soldiers from China’s People’s Liberation Army march on Red Square during a military parade, which marks the 75th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War II, in Moscow on June 24, 2020.

China’s recent live-fire drills near Taiwan were targeted at the island’s government, a military expert said this week, claiming Chinese forces would leave “no chance” for the U.S. to intervene.

Veteran Chinese commentator Du Wenlong spoke confidently about the People’s Liberation Army’s amphibious capabilities on Tuesday amid a six-day, large-scale PLA exercise off the coast of eastern China, roughly 135 nautical miles north of democratic Taiwan.

Appearing as a panelist on Chinese state broadcaster CCTV’s prime-time program *Defense Review*, the analyst said the short distance meant PLA forces would be able to reach the island’s shores “within a day.”

The prolonged Chinese military drills in the East China Sea were announced by China’s maritime safety authority, which issued a no-go zone for merchant vessels lasting through July 21. The exercises—also about 120 nautical miles northeast of the disputed Senkaku Islands—would have involved the PLA’s Eastern Theater Command.



© Fred Lee/Getty Images Planes from the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Air Force fly in formation during a parade to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Communist Party on July 1, 2021, in Beijing, China. Fred Lee/Getty Images

“From a strategic point of view, this allows us to traverse that distance in a very short amount of time, then begin combat maneuvers on the island,” Du said of a hypothetical attack on Taiwan.

The live-fire drills were announced a day after a U.S. Air Force jet landed in Taipei to deliver what local media described as “diplomatic mail” for the American Institute in Taiwan, which is the de facto U.S. embassy on the island. The stopover lasted all but 34 minutes, but the nature of the delivery—involving an American military asset—irked Beijing, which accused the U.S. of trespassing in its airspace.

Du called the PLA exercises a “serious warning” about Taiwan’s continued military engagements with the U.S.

“The current drills a short distance away could be considered a routine exercise, but I think they’re specially targeted [at Taiwan],” Du added. “Taiwan is the target.”

“How much time would the U.S. really have?” Du said, in the event China decided to launch a wave of attacks to invade the island.

He added: “Before U.S. forces arrive, we will have completed all our combat tasks. They will have no chance to intervene in a Taiwan Strait conflict.”

Cross-strait tensions have risen in recent years amid a breakdown in dialogue between Taipei and Beijing, now into its fifth consecutive year. Each side blames the other for the impasse.

As U.S.-Taiwan ties reached new highs in the final year of the Trump administration, they coincided with a straining of relations between the U.S. and China. The Biden administration has been working to reestablish communications at all levels—seen as necessary to avoid misunderstandings and accidents, especially of a military nature.

Beijing, meanwhile, has offered weekly reminders of its intention to “unify” Taiwan, which it considers a Chinese province despite having never governed it. China has also warned Taiwan—increasingly confident about its security because of U.S. backing—that it will use force if necessary.



Taiwan's female artillery brigade takes part in an anti-invasion drill on a beach in Pingtung County on May 30, 2019. Patrick Aventurier/Getty Images



Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Murasame-class destroyer JS Ikazuchi steams alongside the U.S. Navy's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier, USS Ronald Reagan, in the Philippine Sea on August 18, 2020. Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Jason Tarleton/U.S. Navy



U.S. Marines maneuver combat rubber raiding craft after conducting drills in the Coral Sea on July 19, 2021. Lance Cpl. Grace Gerlach/U.S. Marine Corps



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Although the recent PLA drills were considered close at 135 nautical miles, it is not the nearest to Taiwan proper Chinese forces could come.

The choppy strait separating the two neighbors is only 70 nautical miles wide at its narrowest point. Taiwan's outlying islands of Kinmen also lie just 3 miles from the Chinese port of Xiamen in Fujian province.

While the view out of Beijing suggests the PLA is capable of a swift and unannounced attack, military analysts in the U.S. and Taiwan predict such an outcome is far from conclusive.

China watchers say any invasion of Taiwan will require extensive amphibious preparations, including intentional troop movements that will serve as timely indicators for military intelligence in Taipei—and perhaps the U.S., too.

While the possibility of U.S. intervention remains, there is also the likelihood of action by Japan, which could find itself involved in the conflict in its capacity as an American treaty ally. Earlier in July, Japanese Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso intimated that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan could pose an “existential threat” to Japan’s own survival, necessitating a collective defense of the island with U.S. forces.

In addition, the U.S. has about 50,000 forward-deployed troops in Japan, mostly on Okinawa.

But despite the tense atmosphere and bellicose threats of war, analysts say there is no indication that China is preparing an imminent attack. They say Beijing is unlikely to take such a large risk before 2022, when China hosts the Winter Olympics and Chinese President Xi Jinping seeks a third term in the fall.

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